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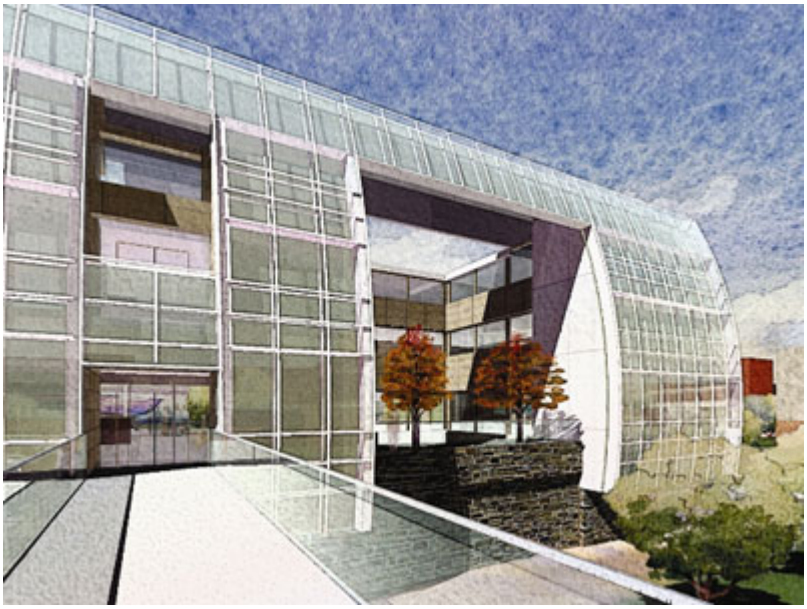
Buildings & Grounds

Two -- Count 'Em, Two -- Platinum Buildings at Ithaca College



A rendering of the new School of Business building at Ithaca College (Robert A.M. Stern Architects)

Ithaca, N.Y. — If you were an attention-seeker, you might think that the spectacular curved fan of glass on a new building at Ithaca College is facing the wrong direction. It looks away from a drive that winds around the front of the campus and away from Cayuga Lake, Cornell University, and the city of Ithaca. This is not exactly a strategy for flaunting your assets.

But it faces south, and it is perfectly oriented to pick up sunlight to illuminate and warm the building. When the building is occupied in January, almost all of the space inside (excluding janitor's closets and bathrooms) will be illuminated with natural light.

The building is one of two new green structures now under construction at Ithaca College, both situated at the front of the campus. Interestingly, the buildings are not associated with the environmental-studies program or the biology program. The glassy building, designed by Robert A.M. Stern Architects, is for the business school and will cost $18-million. The other green building, for which there is only space cleared at the moment, is an administration building by HOLT Architects that will cost $21-million.

After these projects are complete, Ithaca College will be among the first colleges — if not *the* first college — to have two platinum-rated LEED buildings on campus.

"The point of these two buildings was to show that you can do it without a whole lot of bells and whistles," said Peter W. Bardaglio as he stood near the construction site of the business building on a recent afternoon. Mr. Bardaglio was provost here until recently, when he left to work for Second Nature, a group that advocates for sustainability in higher education.

The materials in the business building might be conventional, but their arrangement is not. “There are so many things to learn,” said Dave Geiger, the foreman for one of the contractors working on the building. “I’ve been in the business for 40 years and I’ve never put insulation on the outside of a building before. But it makes sense.”

“When I first heard this project was going to be LEED platinum, I was a little scared” of the paperwork and certification involved, said Sean Cahill, the project manager for the Gilbane Building Company. But now he is visibly excited about working on the building. “This is going to be a signature project for the college.”

The business school at the college has a new focus on sustainability. Mr. Bardaglio said he raised money for the building by telling donors that the building was a teaching opportunity in brick and mortar. “Student ambassadors,” as Mr. Bardaglio called them, will give tours of the building to show off its green features.

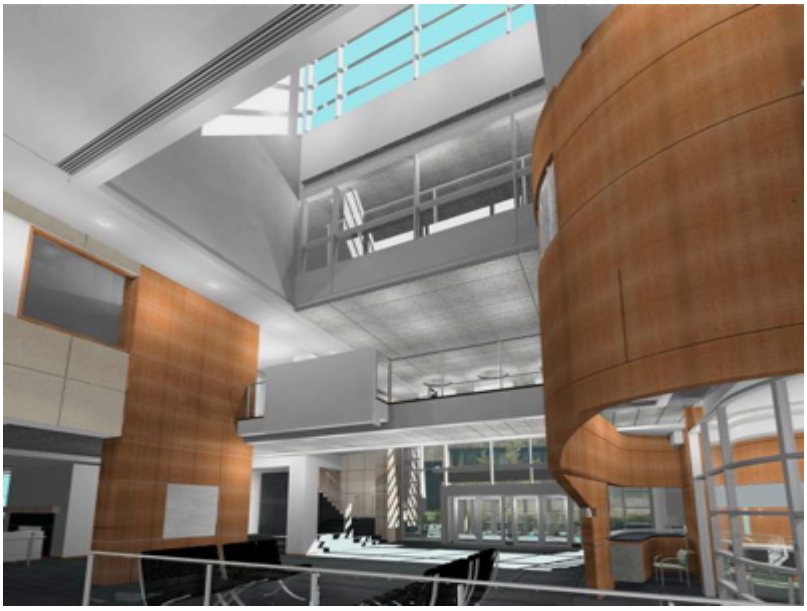
A recent tour of the building — even in an unfinished state, with missing windows, exposed ductwork, rough concrete floors — revealed a spacious and open plan. The designers used computer models to track the sun’s movement and oriented the building to take as much advantage of sunlight as possible. Sensors in the rooms will measure ambient light and movement, and then use that information to control the lights. Part of the building is covered in a green roof, and a 6,000-gallon cistern has been sunk into the ground to collect rainwater for use in the building. Much of the material employed in construction comes from within 500 miles of the site.

Ducts have been sealed until construction is over, to keep contaminants from getting into them. Trash bins outside collect wood, metal, and other garbage in separate bins for recycling. With 70 percent of the construction done, 96 percent of the project’s waste has been kept out of landfills.

HOLT Architects bid to work on the business building but lost out because the firm did not have a strong background in LEED buildings, Mr. Bardaglio said. The firm then sent its architects to get LEED certification and later won the commission to design the administration building. Due to open in fall of 2008, it will make extensive use of day light, incorporate a geothermal system for heating and cooling, and feature a green roof and rainwater cisterns. Much of the building will feature recycled and low-toxicity materials.

Mr. Cahill, the Gilbane project manager, is curious to see how some green elements will perform after the business building opens. As one example, he pointed to the air ducts above him. The ducts in the building do not have an acoustical lining, common in conventional ducts, he said. That lining cuts down on noise that travels from room to room, but it also collects dust and becomes a medium for mold. Theoretically, he said, the way the ducts curve through the walls should stop people from hearing the conversations next door.

Mr. Bardaglio grinned. “Someone should tell the junior faculty: Sound travels.”



A rendering of the new Gateway Building at Ithaca College (HOLT Architects)

By Scott Carlson | Wednesday August 15, 2007